



surviving
a **SUICIDE** loss:
A RESOURCE AND HEALING GUIDE



American Foundation
for Suicide Prevention

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Dear Friend:

We write to you as fellow survivors who have lost loved ones and friends to suicide. We are from all over the country. We look like you. Some of us are recent survivors, others lost loved ones a few years ago, and still others have been survivors for decades. Each of us has struggled in our own way with the pain and complexity of suicide loss.

We met through the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and are members of the AFSP Survivor Council, which works on behalf of suicide survivors throughout the country. Together, we have created this resource guide from our own experiences, hoping it will touch, inform and guide you on your own journey of healing.

When survivors of suicide meet, it is a painful embrace of understanding. To see in the eyes of another the place you are now, or the place you will be, heals and gives hope. The burdens of loss and loneliness, pain and grief, anger and questions, sadness and guilt, belong to all of us.

When we stand together and express our emotions, we begin to heal. When we come together and talk, we are less lonely. We hear our own questions and concerns voiced aloud by others, and feel a sense of comfort that someone understands. The power of our painful thoughts is diminished when spoken and shared.

Healing is not an orderly progression. Somehow we stumble and move forward, and when we risk a look back, we see the many small wonders that marked our path. It may have been a hug we were too numb to feel, a book we were too scattered to absorb, a card that our tear-dimmed eyes wouldn't allow us to read, a story about our loved one that we listened to with both anguish and gratitude. From these things, we are nourished and pulled upright.

As fellow survivors of suicide, we urge you to remember these few but important things:

You are not alone.

There are resources and people to support you.

There is no universal time frame for healing, but you will move forward from the place where you are now.

We wish you strength and courage as you travel through your grieving and your healing.

Be Well.

THE AFSP SURVIVOR COUNCIL

Where Do I Start?

Know that you are not alone.

If you have lost someone to suicide, the first thing you should know is that you are not alone. Each year over 33,000 people in the United States die by suicide — the devastated family and friends they leave behind are known as “survivors.” In fact, research shows that during the course of our lifetime 85% of us will lose someone we care about to suicide. That means that there are millions of survivors who, like you, are trying to cope with this heartbreaking loss.

Survivors often experience a wide range of grief reactions, including some or all of the following:

- **Shock** is a common immediate reaction. You may feel numb or disoriented, and may have trouble concentrating.
- **Symptoms of depression**, including disturbed sleep, loss of appetite, intense sadness, and lack of energy.
- **Anger** towards the deceased, another family member, a therapist, or yourself.
- **Relief**, particularly if the suicide followed a long and difficult mental illness.
- **Guilt**, including thinking, “If only I had...”

These feelings usually diminish over time, as you develop your ability to cope and begin to heal.

Why Did This Happen?

90% of all people who die by suicide have a diagnosable psychiatric disorder at the time of their death.

Many survivors struggle to understand the reasons for the suicide, asking themselves over and over again: “**Why?**” Many replay their loved ones’ last days, searching for clues, particularly if they didn’t see any signs that suicide was imminent.

Because suicide is often poorly understood, some survivors feel unfairly victimized by stigma. They may feel that suicide is somehow shameful, or that they or their family are somehow to blame for this tragedy.

But you should know that 90% of all people who die by suicide have a diagnosable psychiatric disorder at the time of their death (most often depression or bipolar disorder). Just as people can die of heart disease or cancer, people can die as a consequence of mental illness. Try to bear in mind that suicide is almost always complicated, resulting from a combination of painful suffering, desperate hopelessness, and underlying psychiatric illness. As psychologists Bob Baugher and Jack Jordan explain,

“ [O]nce a person has decided to end his or her life, there are limits to how much anyone can do to stop the act....In fact, people sometimes find a way to kill themselves even when hospitalized in locked psychiatric units under careful supervision. In light of this fact, try to be realistic about how preventable the suicide was and how much you could have done to intervene.

...Medical research is also demonstrating that major psychiatric disorders involve changes in the functioning of the brain that can severely alter the thinking, mood, and behavior of someone suffering from the disorder. ...The illness produces biological changes in the individual that create the emotional and physical pain (depression, inability to take pleasure in things, hopelessness, etc.) which contribute to almost all suicides.”

Bob Baugher and Jack Jordan, *After Suicide Loss: Coping with Your Grief* (see Bibliography).

Suicide Bereavement 101

Survivors often wonder how bereavement after suicide compares to bereavement after other kinds of death.

"[S]pecial themes of suicide bereavement manifest themselves in three broad areas of grief response.

First, numerous studies have found that survivors seem to struggle more with questions of meaning-making around the death ("Why did they do it?")... survivors often struggle to make sense of the motives and frame of mind of the deceased.

Second, survivors show higher levels of feelings of guilt, blame, and responsibility for the death than other mourners ("Why didn't I prevent it?")...Occasionally, survivors feel that they directly caused the death through mistreatment or abandonment of the deceased. More frequently, they blame themselves for not anticipating and preventing the actual act of suicide...

Third, several studies indicate that survivors experience heightened feelings of rejection or abandonment by the loved one, along with anger toward the deceased ("How could they do this to me?")."

Excerpted from Jordan, J., Is Suicide Bereavement Different? A Reassessment of the Literature. Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior 2001; 31(1): 91-102. See also Sveen, C-A. and Walby, F., Suicide Survivors' Mental Health and Grief Reactions: A Systematic Review of Controlled Studies. SLTB 2008; 38(1): 13-29.

What Do I Do Now?

**It's important to remember that you can survive the pain.
There may be times when you don't think it's possible, but it is.**

Here is some guidance from fellow survivors:

- Some survivors struggle with what to tell other people. Although you should make whatever decision feels right to you, most survivors have found it best to simply acknowledge that their loved one died by suicide.
- You may find that it helps to reach out to family and friends. Because some people may not know what to say, you may need to take the initiative to talk about the suicide, share your feelings, and ask for their help.
- Even though it may seem difficult, maintaining contact with other people is especially important during the stress-filled months after a loved one's suicide.
- Keep in mind that each person grieves in his or her own way. For example, some people visit the cemetery weekly; others find it too painful to go at all.
- Each person also grieves at his or her own pace; there is no set rhythm or timeline for healing.
- Anniversaries, birthdays and holidays may be especially difficult, so you might want to think about whether to continue old traditions or create some new ones.
- You may experience unexpected waves of sadness; these are a normal part of the grieving process.
- Some survivors find comfort in community, religious, or spiritual activities, including talking to a trusted member of the clergy.
- Many survivors use the arts to help them heal, by keeping a journal, or writing poetry or music.
- Try to take care of your own well-being; consider visiting your doctor for a check-up.
- Be kind to yourself. When you feel ready, begin to go on with your life. Eventually starting to enjoy life again is not a betrayal of your loved one, but rather a sign that you've begun to heal.

Here are some additional suggestions:

1. Know you can survive. You may not think so, but you can.
2. Struggle with “why” it happened until you no longer need to know “why” or until you are satisfied with partial answers.
3. Know you may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings, but all your feelings are normal.
4. Anger, guilt, confusion, forgetfulness are common responses. You are not crazy — you are in mourning.
5. Be aware you may feel appropriate anger at the person, at the world, at God, at yourself. It’s okay to express it.
6. You may feel guilty for what you think you did or did not do. Guilt can turn into regret through forgiveness.
7. Having suicidal thoughts is common. It does not mean that you will act on those thoughts.
8. Remember to take one moment or one day at a time.
9. Find a good listener with whom to share. Call someone if you need to talk.
10. Don’t be afraid to cry. Tears are healing.
11. Give yourself time to heal.
12. Remember, the choice was not yours. No one is the sole influence in another’s life.
13. Expect setbacks. If emotions return like a tidal wave, you may only be experiencing a remnant of grief, an unfinished piece.
14. Try to put off major decisions.
15. Give yourself permission to get professional help.
16. Be aware of the pain of your family and friends.
17. Be patient with yourself and with others who may not understand.

18. Set your own limits and learn to say no.
19. Steer clear of people who want to tell you what or how to feel.
20. Know that there are support groups that can be helpful. If you can't find one, ask a professional to help start one.
21. Call on your personal faith to help you through.
22. It is common to experience physical reactions to your grief, such as headaches, loss of appetite, inability to sleep.
23. The willingness to laugh with others and at yourself is healing.
24. Wear out all your questions, anger, guilt or other feelings until you can let them go. Letting go doesn't mean forgetting.
25. Know that you will never be the same again, but you can survive and even go beyond just surviving.

Iris Bolton. Reprinted with permission from *Suicide and Its Aftermath: Understanding and Counseling the Survivors* by Edward Dunne, John McIntosh and Karen Dunne-Maxim. (See Bibliography)



Handling The Holidays

Do what you think will be comfortable for you. Remember, you can always choose to do things differently next time.

- Think about your family's holiday traditions. Consider whether you want to continue them or create some new ones.
- Remember that family members may feel differently about continuing to do things the way they've been done in the past. Try to talk openly with each other about your expectations.
- Consider whether you want to be with your family and friends for the holiday, or whether it would be more healing for you to be by yourself or go away (this year).
- Keep in mind that sometimes the anticipation of an event can be more difficult than the event itself.
- If you find it comforting to talk about your loved one, let your family and friends know that; tell them not to be afraid to mention your loved one's name.
- Some survivors find it comforting to acknowledge the birthday of their loved one by gathering with his/her friends and family; others prefer to spend it privately.
- Some survivors have found the following ritual helpful for a variety of occasions:

Light two candles, and then blow one out. Explain that the extinguished candle represents those we've lost, while the one that continues to burn represents those of us who go on despite our loss and pain.

Simply leave the one candle burning (you can put it off to one side) for the duration of the holiday meal or event. The glowing flame acts as a quiet reminder of those who are missing.

- Above all, bear in mind that there is no "right" way to handle holidays, anniversaries, or birthdays. You and your family may decide to try several different approaches before finding one that feels best for you.

For Your Friends

When friends ask how they can help, you might want to give them a copy of this section.

When there has been a death of a loved one by suicide, survivors will experience a depth and range of feelings. It is important to honor and respect the needs of the survivors in the days, weeks and months following the suicide. Often you may feel helpless. These guidelines help you understand what may be comforting to the family. However, before you assume responsibilities, we believe it's important to ask survivors whether they need your help. Some survivors gain added strength from performing many of the responsibilities below, while others may want to rely on friends or family for support and guidance.

Since recently bereaved people may have trouble concentrating or making decisions, instead of simply asking "How can I help?" you might try asking if you can help with specific tasks, like babysitting, dog walking, grocery shopping, cleaning the house, watering the lawn, or organizing paperwork.

- Respond honestly to questions asked by the family. You don't need to answer more than asked.
- If they want to know more, they will ask later.
- Surround them with as much love and understanding as you can.
- Give them some private time. Be there, but don't smother them.
- Show love, not control.
- Let them talk. Most of the time they just need to hear out loud what is going on inside their heads. They usually aren't seeking advice.
- Encourage the idea that decisions be made by the family together.
- Expect that they will become tired easily. Grieving is hard work.
- Let them decide what they are ready for. Offer your ideas but let them decide themselves.

- Keep a list of phone calls, visitors and people who bring food and gifts.
- Offer to make calls to people they wish to notify.
- Keep the mail straight. Keep track of bills, cards, newspaper notices, etc.
- Help with errands.
- Keep a list of medication administered.
- Offer to help with documentation needed by the insurance company, such as a copy of the death certificate.
- Give special attention to members of the family — at the funeral and in the months to come.
- Allow them to express as much grief as they are feeling at the moment and are willing to share.
- Allow them to talk about the special endearing qualities of the loved one they have lost.

Reprinted with permission, The Link Counseling Center's National Resource Center for Suicide Prevention and Aftercare.

Here are two other thoughts:

- Write down a story about their loved one (especially one that they might not know themselves) and give it to them, so that they can read it when they're ready.
- Don't be afraid to say their loved one's name. Don't worry about making them cry; it hurts so much more when no one talks about the person they lost.

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Survivor Stories

Knowing that others share the same experience can bring hope and healing.

Many survivors find it helpful to hear others tell their stories. Each issue of AFSP's Lifesavers newsletter includes a "Survivor Story," where survivors who are active in the work of suicide prevention can both honor their loved one and share how they have coped. These stories, some of which are very briefly excerpted below, are reprinted in full at www.afsp.org.

"...There is a litany of feelings that all survivors of suicide know too well. The flippant use of 'I could just kill myself'; the incessant wondering of why? why? why?; the anniversary of the death and its importance (no matter how long it has been); someone remembering that this is the day your world stopped and then started differently; the fear of memories yellowing and becoming harder to recall; and the instant connection that many survivors have with one another..." (Tinka).

"Have I reached acceptance? Resignation perhaps. When the front door creaks open, I no longer expect to see [my wife] come in. For the longest time I did slip occasionally. I would find myself starting to clip an article to bring home to her. At book sales I still sometimes reach for a book that I think she'd like.... I never was a macho type, but I am of the 'Men don't cry' generation. Grief has permanently loosened my tear ducts, and today it doesn't take much to get me teary and choked up.... In addition to crying more easily, I think I've developed a greater empathy. I'm more likely to try to understand, and make allowances for why people act the way they do." (William)

"...During the first couple of months after my sister's suicide, we talked about her incessantly. We reminisced about how she acted and looked. We had an insatiable desire to reconstruct the weeks before she died. We recounted the last conversations, moods, phone calls, photographs and meals, hoping that somehow our memories would explain the answer to why she'd killed herself. That question still gnawed at our guts, creating a big, black, empty hole..." (Debbie).

"...The incredible emotional pain of the loss of my son was ever present. Recurrent tears, heaviness in my chest, frequent sighing, and the inability to sleep became commonplace. Although the structure and routine of my office was somewhat comforting, I found it difficult to concentrate or focus on tasks — at work or at home. It was as though my brain was rebelling against this experience. Or possibly this was my brain's way of forcing me to be gentle with myself in my grief ..." (Linda).

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Several of the books listed in the Bibliography at the end of this Guide also contain survivor stories, including *No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One*, in which author/survivor Carla Fine writes:

"...Since [my husband's] suicide, I felt increasingly isolated from my friends and family. They had no idea what I was going through, all their well-intentioned advice and words of comfort seemed ignorant at best and tinged with cruelty at worst... I thought about the singular bond suicide survivors share with one another. Even though each of our situations is unique, we all experience similar stages in our grieving. When we meet someone else who has been there, it makes our personal chaos and isolated secrecy seem a little less frightening."

Hearing how others have struggled through and survived the pain, confusion, questions, and stigma of suicide loss is an important part of the healing process for many survivors.

Helping Children Cope

Children are particularly vulnerable to feeling abandoned and guilty. Listen to their questions, and try to offer honest, straightforward, age-appropriate answers.

Survivors frequently seek advice about how to explain suicide to children. Here are some suggestions:

- Tell the truth — in simple, age-appropriate language. Explain that their loved one died of an illness — a brain illness. For example: “Daddy had something like a heart attack except it was a ‘brain attack.’”
- When you have a choice, tell them as soon as you have the news, in a place where both you and they will feel comfortable.
- Reassure them that the death was not their fault.
- Resist the urge to keep the suicide a secret out of fear that the child will copy the behavior of the deceased. Just as families with hypertension, diabetes or heart disease are educated about early warning signs and prevention, relatives of suicide victims need to understand the early warning signs of depression and other mental illnesses so they can obtain proper treatment.
- Reassure them that you, together with other appropriate adults, will take care of them.
- Let them know they can approach you at any time if they want to talk about it.
- Children may express their feelings by crying, withdrawing, laughing, or expressing anger at you or others. Or, they may not. Simply let them know you are available for whatever they need — now or at some later time.
- Resume and maintain the child’s regular routine as much as possible.
- The greatest gift you can give children is your assurance of love and support. Allow them to express their feelings, answer their questions, and provide them with affection.

*Adapted from *Child Survivors of Suicide: A Guidebook for Those Who Care for Them*, by Rebecca Parkin and Karen Dunne-Maxim (see Bibliography).*

For suggestions of other resources to help you help children, see the Bibliography. You might also want to contact The Dougy Center, the National Center for Grieving Children & Families (see Organizations).

Support Groups

It can be so powerful to connect with other survivors. And such a relief to be able to talk openly about suicide with people who really understand.

For so many survivors, a crucial part of their healing process is the support and sense of connection they feel through sharing their grief with other survivors. The most common way this sharing occurs is through survivor support groups. These groups provide a safe place where survivors can share their experiences and support each other.

It is natural to feel a bit unsure about going to your first support group meeting. In *No Time to Say Goodbye* (see Bibliography), one facilitator explains what you can expect:

“We sit in a circle, with each person giving a brief introduction: first name, who was lost, when it was, and how it happened. I then ask the people who are attending for the first time to begin, because they usually have an urgent need to talk. The rest of the group reaches out to them by describing their own experiences and how they are feeling. The new people realize they are not alone with their nightmare. By comparing their situations with others, they also begin to understand that they don’t have a monopoly on pain.”

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Some survivors attend a support group almost immediately, some wait for years; others attend for a year or two and then go only occasionally — on anniversaries, holidays, or particularly difficult days. You may find that it takes a few meetings before you begin to feel comfortable. Or, you may find that the group setting isn’t quite right for you, but can still be a useful way to meet one or two fellow survivors who become new, lifelong friends based on the common bond of understanding the pain and tragedy of suicide loss.

For a state-by-state directory of over 500 suicide survivor support groups throughout the country, visit www.afsp.org or call 1-888-333-AFSP toll-free.

Many survivors who live in areas without a support group have found online support groups to be a useful resource. The Online Resources section at the end of this Resource Guide has a list of several of these groups.

International Survivors of Suicide Day

At AFSP's International Survivors of Suicide Day, fellow survivors come together for support, healing, information and empowerment.

One of the most powerful ways to connect with other survivors is through AFSP's International Survivors of Suicide Day, an annual event held every year on the Saturday before Thanksgiving.

On that Day, survivor conferences are held in cities throughout the U.S. and abroad, offering speakers, workshops, and sharing sessions. In addition to their local programming, all of the conference sites watch a 90-minute AFSP broadcast that includes "experienced" survivors and mental health professionals addressing the questions that so many survivors face: Why did this happen? How do I cope? Where can I find support? Since many survivors also find it helpful to understand something about the science of suicide prevention and bereavement, the program also includes a brief presentation of what scientific research has revealed about the psychiatric illnesses associated with suicide.

The broadcast is also available online at www.afsp.org, so that survivors can participate even if there isn't a conference in their area, or if they find it difficult to attend in person. And it's followed by a live online chat. On www.afsp.org you can also view last year's program free of charge at anytime, and can find information about the sites for this year's conference.

Information about other healing conferences throughout the year is also available through:

- Your local AFSP chapter (a list of AFSP Chapters is available at www.afsp.org)
- Survivor support groups (a directory of support groups is available at www.afsp.org)
- American Association of Suicidology (www.suicidology.org) (annual conference for survivors of suicide loss)
- The Compassionate Friends (www.compassionatefriends.org) (annual conference for grieving parents and siblings; not specific to suicide loss)

Survivor Outreach Program

Through the AFSP Survivor Outreach Program, trained volunteer survivors from select AFSP chapters are available upon request to visit newly-bereaved survivors to listen, support them and provide information about resources for healing.

AFSP's Survivor Outreach Program is designed to help those who have recently lost a loved one to suicide.

Survivors may find that those around them have difficulty understanding what they are going through. Often, a survivor may not know anyone else who has had this experience, and doesn't know where to find reliable information or where to learn about local resources.

Most survivors who have met others who have also experienced a suicide loss can attest to the power of this shared connection. It is often a fellow survivor who can recommend a book, connect someone to a support group or another resource, or simply provide reassurance.

The Survivor Outreach Program is available through select AFSP Chapters. For more information, contact AFSP at survivingsuicidelos@afsp.org or 888-333-AFSP, or visit our website, www.afsp.org.

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The Survivor e-Network

Through the AFSP Survivor e-Network, survivors learn about resources for healing and opportunities to get involved.

The goal of the e-Network is instant communication to the survivor community. The e-Network keeps you informed about a wide range of topics, including upcoming healing conferences, events, research developments and advocacy opportunities.

JOIN TODAY. The e-Network is free of charge, and it takes only a moment to register at www.afsp.org.

When You're Ready

The time required for healing cannot be neatly measured against any calendar. Piece by piece, you begin to re-enter the world.

And as you do, you might be interested in finding out about opportunities to **get involved**. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention reaches out to survivors with two goals in mind: to offer the support that is so vital, particularly to the newly bereaved, and opportunities for survivors looking to get involved in prevention and advocacy. AFSP was founded in 1987 by concerned scientists, business and community leaders, and survivors in an effort to support the research and education needed to prevent suicide. We remain the leading national not-for-profit organization exclusively dedicated to understanding and preventing suicide through research, education and advocacy, and to reaching out to people with mental disorders and those impacted by suicide.

Some survivors find it healing to help others, by facilitating a survivor support group or starting a new one; AFSP has developed a comprehensive, hands-on **training program** to help survivors learn the “how-to’s” of **creating and facilitating a support group**. It is appropriate both for survivors who would like to start a new group, as well as those who currently facilitate a group and would like to increase their knowledge and skills. Self-study materials are also available.

Many survivors volunteer with the Foundation’s network of active **chapters** in communities across the country, which sponsor local conferences, community events and educational programs. Many survivors have helped to establish new chapters in their communities.

Thousands of survivors participate each year in AFSP’s Out of the Darkness Overnight and Community Walks, raising funds and awareness for suicide prevention. For more information about how to get involved go to www.afsp.org.

Some survivors go on to establish **memorial funds** at the Foundation, to help underwrite a variety of important and meaningful programs. One such fund supports a groundbreaking public-private collaboration between AFSP and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to develop a research agenda specifically addressing survivors. Another supported the production of a film that encourages college students to recognize depression as a serious illness and seek treatment.

To **learn more** about these and other opportunities to get involved, please email us at inquiry@afsp.org or visit our web site, www.afsp.org, call us toll-free at (888) 333-AFSP, or write to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 120 Wall Street, 29th Floor, New York, NY 10005.

We are each in charge of our own journey of healing. May you always be traveling further.

Organizations

**The American Foundation
for Suicide Prevention**
120 Wall Street, 29th Floor
New York, NY 10005
888-333-AFSP
www.afsp.org

Sponsors International Survivors of Suicide Day, the Survivor e-Network and survivor support group facilitator training program. Publishes an extensive bibliography, support group directory and information about suicide and mental illness. Funds scientific research, develops prevention initiatives and offers educational programs and conferences for survivors, mental health professionals, physicians and the public.

American Association of Suicidology
202-237-2280
www.suicidology.org

Promotes public awareness, education and training for professionals, and sponsors an annual "Healing After Suicide" conference for survivors.

American Psychiatric Association
888-357-7924
www.healthyminds.org

Information about mental health and choosing a psychiatrist.

American Psychological Association
800-374-2721
www.apa.org

Resource for referrals to psychologists.

**Canadian Association for
Suicide Prevention**
(204) 784-4073
www.casp-acps.ca

Online list of Canadian survivor support groups. Promotes public awareness, training, education, advocacy.

The Compassionate Friends
630-990-0010
www.compassionatefriends.org

For all parents, siblings and grandparents who have experienced the death of a child, brother, sister or grandchild. Sponsors support groups, newsletters and on-line support groups throughout the country, as well as an annual national conference for bereaved families.

The Dougy Center
The National Center for Grieving
Children & Families
503-775-5683
www.dougy.org

Publishes extensive resources for helping children and teens who are grieving the death of a parent, sibling, or friend, including, "After Suicide: A Workbook for Grieving Kids."

**International Association for Suicide
Prevention**
+33 562 29 19 47

www.iasp.info/postvention.php

An international organization with a postvention task force and newsletter. Website lists organizations and support groups for survivors of suicide loss around the world.

**National Organization for People of
Color Against Suicide**
866-899-5317
www.nopcas.com

Provides resources to minority communities in the areas of survivor support and suicide prevention and education, including sponsoring an annual conference.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

A 24-hour, toll-free suicide prevention service available to anyone in suicidal crisis. You will be routed to the closest possible crisis center in your area. With crisis centers across the country, their mission is to provide immediate assistance to anyone seeking mental health services. Call for yourself, or someone you care about. Your call is free and confidential.

Online Resources

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education
952-946-7998
www.save.org

Grassroots nonprofit organization that educates about depression and provides resources on suicide and depression, a newsletter and survivor conference.

Suicide Information and Education Centre
403-245-3900
www.suicideinfo.ca

Computer-assisted resource library with extensive collection of materials on suicide, including information kits, pamphlets, literature searches and clipping services.

Suicide Prevention Resource Center
877-GET-SPRC
www.sprc.org

Features an extensive online library of information on suicide prevention and surviving suicide loss, a nationwide calendar of events, and customized web pages for survivors, teachers, teens, clergy, and more.

For the most recent information about online resources, visit www.afsp.org

www.groww.org (online support groups organized by type of loss (including suicide) and relationship)

www.livingthroughsuicide.invisionzone.com (online support group)

www.pos-ffos.com (Parents of Suicides and Friends & Families of Suicides internet communities and online support groups)

www.siblingsurvivors.com (created by a survivor after she lost her sister to suicide)

Spouses of Suicides
(online support group, email
Spousesofsuicides-subscribe@yahoo.com
to join)

www.suicidegrief.com (survivor discussion board)

www.suicidereferencelibrary.com (resource list created and maintained by volunteers from several on-line survivor communities)

www.survivorsofsuicide.com (contains general information about surviving suicide loss)

www.thegiftofkeith.org (created by a survivor family; contains information and resources about surviving suicide loss)

Bibliography

New titles are periodically added to this bibliography. Visit www.afsp.org for the most recent additions.

SURVIVOR GUIDES

After Suicide Loss: Coping with Your Grief

Bob Baugher, Ph.D., and Jack Jordan, Ph.D., 2002.

Available through AFSP. This excellent handbook is organized chronologically, around the first days, weeks, and months of a suicide loss. It includes straightforward information about psychiatric disorders, and when to seek professional help, as well as practical strategies for coping and healing.

Dying to Be Free: A Healing Guide for Families after a Suicide

Beverly Cobain and Jean Larch, Hazelden Foundation, 2006.

Co-authored by the cousin of Kurt Cobain, the lead singer of the band Nirvana who took his own life in 1994, and a crisis intervention specialist, this book combines personal accounts from survivors with practical guidance for coping with suicide loss.

Healing After the Suicide of a Loved One

Ann Smolin and John Guinan, Simon and Schuster, 1993.

So many survivors struggle with wondering, "why?" and "what if?" This book contains case studies together with advice, to help survivors begin to heal.

Lay My Burden Down: Unraveling Suicide and the Mental Health Crisis Among African-Americans

Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D., and Amy Alexander, Beacon Press, 2001.

One of the few books about suicide and mental health problems within the African-American community.

Reaching Out After Suicide: What's Helpful and What's Not

Linda H. Kilburn, M.S.W. Available from KP Associates, LLC (KPAMASS@aol.com), 2008.

The author, a clinical hospice social worker and survivor of her daughter's suicide, offers practical advice for well-meaning friends and family who want to reach out and be supportive after a suicide, but aren't sure what to do or say.

Silent Grief: Living in the Wake of Suicide

Christopher Lukas and Henry Seiden, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007.

Co-authored by a psychologist and a survivor of multiple suicide losses, this book is written with sensitivity and understanding, and offers simple, constructive suggestions for healing along with straightforward information and a message of hope.

Suicide and its Aftermath: Understanding and Counseling the Survivors

Edward Dunne, John McIntosh, and Karen Dunne-Maxim (Eds.), W.W. Norton and Company, 1987.

This compilation of articles and essays captures various dimensions of the many different aspects of the experience of surviving after a suicide loss. Although written by and for professional counselors, it's very readable for the general public.

Suicide Survivors' Handbook — Expanded Edition

Trudy Carlson, Benline Press, 2000.

Providing specific suggestions and practical advice from other survivors, the author addresses the questions: Why? What about shame and guilt? How long does the pain last? What helps? How do you deal with others?

Suicide of a Child

Aдина Wroblewski, Centering Corp., 2002.
A basic guide for early bereavement after your child's suicide. Comfortable, compassionate, easy-to-read observations and personal messages.

Survivors of Suicide

Rita Robinson and Phyllis Hart, New Page Books, 2001.
A compilation of advice and survivor stories.

Touched by Suicide: Hope and Healing After Loss

Michael F. Myers, M.D., and Carla Fine, Gotham Books, 2006.
Co-authored by a psychiatrist and survivor, this book offers detailed steps, practical suggestions, and compassionate advice for how to cope with all aspects of suicide.

SURVIVOR STORIES***A Force Unfamiliar To Me: A Cautionary Tale***

Jane Butler, Hamlet Books, 1998.
A mother's personal account of her son's depression and suicide. Explores some of the familiar challenges many survivor families face, such as how to handle the holidays and the struggles of grief between the parents of a child who dies by suicide.

A Special Scar: The Experience of People Bereaved by Suicide

Alison Wertheimer, Routledge, 2001.
The author (who lost her sister to suicide) presents interviews with 50 survivors, and covers a wide range of issues, including the press, stigma, guilt, anger and rejection.

Before Their Time: Adult Children's Experiences of Parental Suicide

Mary and Maureen Stimming, Temple University Press, 1999.
Presents adult children survivors' accounts of their loss, grief, and resolution following a parent's suicide. Separate sections offer perspectives on the deaths of mothers and fathers. Also includes the reflections of four siblings on the shared loss of their mother.

Blue Genes: A Memoir of Loss and Survival

Christopher Lukas, Doubleday, 2008.
Christopher (Kit) Lukas, co-author of Silent Grief: Living in the Wake of Suicide, survived the suicide of his mother when he was a young boy. Neither he nor his brother were told how she'd died, and both went on to confront their own struggles with depression, a disease that ran throughout their family. In 1997, Kit's brother Tony, a Pulitzer-prize winning author, took his own life. Blue Genes is Kit's exploration of his family history, his personal journey and his determination to find strength and hope.

Dead Reckoning: A Therapist Confronts His Own Grief

David C. Treadway, BasicBooks, 1996.
The author, now a successful family therapist, was just twenty when his mother, a longtime alcoholic, took her own life. Even as he counsels his clients on how to deal with death, loss and grief, he finds himself increasingly unable to manage his own. Turning to his own therapist for help, Treadway includes the reader on his journey of healing as he finally comes to terms with his mother's death.

In Her Wake: A Child Psychiatrist Explores the Mystery of Her Mother's Suicide

Nancy Rappaport. Basic Books, 2009.

Dr. Nancy Rappaport, a child psychiatrist, lost her mother to suicide at the age of four. Encouraged by her own children's curiosity about their grandmother, and fortified by her professional training in psychiatry, she began to look into her mother's life and death. Drawing on court papers, newspaper clippings, her mother's unpublished novel, and interviews with family and friends, she explores the impact of her mother's suicide from the perspective of a daughter, psychiatrist, wife, and mother herself, in this deeply personal memoir.

My Son...My Son: A Guide to Healing After Death, Loss or Suicide

Iris Bolton and Curtis Mitchell, The Bolton Press, 1995.

A mother's account of her progression through the grief process after the suicide of her 20-year old son.

Never Regret the Pain: Loving and Losing a Bipolar Spouse

Sel Erder Yackley, Helm Publishing, 2008.

In her memoir, Sel Erder Yackley, mother of three, provides the reader an intimate glimpse into her family's struggle to understand, cope with, and grieve the bipolar disorder and ultimate suicide of her husband, a well-respected judge.

No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One

Carla Fine, Doubleday, 1996.

Following the suicide of her husband, the author interviewed over 100 suicide survivors. She weaves their experiences into her book, creating a story of loss, grief and survival.

Remembering Garrett: One Family's Battle with a Child's Depression

United States Senator Gordon H. Smith, Caroll & Graf, 2006.

A personal account by the U.S. Senator from Oregon, whose 21 year-old son took his own life, and whose speech on the Senate floor led to overwhelming bipartisan support for the passage of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act, which increased federal funding to prevent youth suicide.

Sanity & Grace: A Journey of Suicide, Survival, and Strength

Judy Collins, Tarcher/Penguin, 2003.

A grieving mother and celebrity shares her own story about the loss of her son to suicide and her own struggle with mental illness.

The Empty Chair: The Journey of Grief After Suicide

Beryl Glover, In Sight Books, 2000.

The grief process as experienced by a variety of people dealing with different emotions following the suicide of a family member.

The Suicide Index: Putting My Father's Death in Order

Joan Wickersham, Harcourt Inc., 2008.

Wickersham uses an index – the most orderly of structures – to try to make sense of her father's suicide. The family history, business failures and encounters with friends and doctors are assembled into a philosophical, deeply personal and beautifully-written exploration of the mystery of her father's life and death.

HELPING CHILDREN

After a Parent's Suicide: Helping Children Heal

Margo Requarth, Healing Hearts Press, 2006.

Written by a bereavement counselor who lost her own mother to suicide when she was just under four years old, this book offers constructive, compassionate and clear suggestions for helping children.

After a Suicide: A Workbook for Grieving Kids

Available through The Dougy Center (see Organizations, page 20).

Developed for use with children, this workbook combines explanations of mental illness and suicide, creative exercises, practical advice, and quotations from child survivors.

But I Didn't Say Goodbye: For Parents and Professionals Helping Child Suicide Survivors

Barbara Rubel, Griefwork Center, Inc., 2000.

Told from the point of view of a child, this book is intended for adults to read and then share with children.

Child Survivors of Suicide: A Guidebook for Those Who Care for Them

Rebecca Parkin and Karen Dunne-Maxim, 1995.

Available through AFSP. This practical guide offers guidance for family members, educators, and others who deal with young survivors.

My Uncle Keith Died

Carol Ann Loehr, Trafford Publishing, 2006.

Written in clear simple language easily understood by children, this book offers hope and practical ways to explain suicide to children. It explains the difference between sadness and depression, and describes how chemical imbalances in the brain cause illnesses that can result in suicide.

Someone I Love Died By Suicide: A Story for Child Survivors and Those Who Care for Them

Doreen Cammarata, Grief Guidance, Inc., 2000.

An illustrated book that explains depression and suicide in child-friendly language.

FOR ADOLESCENTS AND TEENAGERS

After

Francis Chalifour, Tundra, 2005.

Nominated for the Canadian Governor General's Literary Awards 2005, this autobiographical novel tells the story of 15-year-old Francis, whose father took his own life. It explores Francis's struggles with guilt, anger, profound sadness and search for hope, during the first year after his father's suicide.

After a Suicide: Young People Speak Up

Susan Kuklin, Putnam Publishing Group, 1994.

Nine personal accounts of survivors, many of whom are teens. Each account focuses on a specific topic, such as losing a parent, losing a sibling, seeking therapy, support groups.

FOR MEN

Men & Grief: A Guide for Men Surviving the Death of a Loved One and a Resource for Caregivers and Mental Health Professionals

Carol Staudacher, New Harbinger Publications, Inc. 1991.

Of particular interest are separate chapters addressing bereavement experienced during boyhood, adolescence, and adulthood, as well as a chapter on the effect of alcohol abuse on grief. While the book does include some discussion of bereavement after suicide, the focus is on the male experience of bereavement generally.

Real Men Do Cry: A Quarterback's Inspiring Story of Tackling Depression and Surviving Suicide Loss

Eric Hipple, with Dr. Gloria Horsley and Dr. Heidi Horsley. Quality of Life Publishing Co., 2008.

Hipple, former NFL quarterback for the Detroit Lions and survivor of his 15 year-old son's suicide, candidly shares his own life-long struggle with depression, including his bankruptcy, imprisonment for drunk driving, and ultimate decision to seek treatment. A practical guide for men and the women who care about them.

Swallowed by a Snake: The Gift of the Masculine Side of Healing

Thomas R. Golden, Golden Healing Publishing, 1996.

This book by a licensed clinical social worker explores the stereotypically "masculine" experience of grief. In the author's words, "[a] man reading these pages will find a book that honors the uniqueness of a man's path toward healing. A woman reading this book will benefit not only from gaining a deeper understanding of the men in her life, she will find herself in these pages."

When a Man Faces Grief/A Man You Know is Grieving: 12 Practical Ideas to Help You Heal From Loss

Thomas Golden and James Miller. Willowgreen Publishing 1998.

This book focuses on grief in general (not grief after suicide per se), exploring the authors' view of the "masculine side" of healing. The book's format is unique: the first half of the book provides guidance to the grieving man himself; turned upside down, the book then offers his family and friends advice on how best to help him. The twelve suggestions in each half of the book are practical and straightforward.

When Suicide Comes Home: A Father's Diary and Comments

Paul Cox, Bolton Press 2002.

A father's perspective on the first year following his son's suicide, this book is written in a simple, straightforward way – an easy read for early grief. While written from a father's perspective, female readers (especially spouses) have said that it helped them better understand the male experience of grief.

POETRY/INSPIRATIONAL

A Long-Shadowed Grief: Suicide and its Aftermath

Harold Ivan Smith, Cowley Publications 2006.

Written from a Christian perspective, this book by a survivor of his cousin's suicide and former funeral director explores the aftermath of suicide through the lenses of spirituality and theology.

Finding Your Way After the Suicide of Someone You Love

David B. Biebel, D.Min., & Suzanne L. Foster, M.A., Zondervan, 2005.

Co-authored by a survivor and a minister, this book looks at the experience of suicide bereavement from a Christian perspective.

From the Ashes Flies the Phoenix: Creating a Powerful Life After a Suicide

Gretta Krane, Inspiring Enterprises 2006.

The survivor of her husband's suicide, Gretta Krane shares her own journey, with the hope that it will inspire others to find self-discovery, growth, and hope in the aftermath of suicide loss.

Healing the Hurt Spirit: Daily Affirmations for People Who Have Lost a Loved One to Suicide

Catherine Greenleaf, St. Dymphna Press, 2006.

Written by a longtime survivor of multiple suicide losses, this non-denominational book encourages survivors to explore their grief through a series of simple readings and daily affirmations.

Incomplete Knowledge

Jeffrey Harrison, Four Way Books, 2006.

The second half of this book of poetry (in particular the moving sequence titled "The Undertaking") speaks eloquently of the loss of the writer's brother to suicide, delving into isolated moments in the immediate aftermath and extended process of grief.

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SUICIDE AND MENTAL ILLNESS

An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness

Kay Redfield Jamison, Ph.D., Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

In this memoir, the author, an international authority on bipolar disorder, describes her own struggle since adolescence with the disorder, and how it has shaped her life.

Darkness Visible

William Styron, Random House, 1990.

A powerful and moving first-hand account of what depression feels like to the sufferer.

Demystifying Psychiatry: A Resource for Patients and Families

Charles Zorumski and Eugene Rubin. Oxford University Press, 2010.

The authors, both psychiatrists, explain modern day psychiatry – including the mental illnesses most closely associated with suicide risk – in this straightforward primer developed for a lay audience.

Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide

Kay Redfield Jamison, Ph.D., Alfred A. Knopf, 1999.

Weaving together an in-depth psychological and scientific exploration of the subject, this book traces the network of reasons underlying suicide, including the factors that interact to cause suicide, and the evolving treatments available from modern medicine. Includes a particular focus on suicide by adolescents and young adults.

No One Saw My Pain: Why Teens Kill Themselves

Andrew Slaby and Lili Frank Garfinkle, W.W. Norton and Company, 1995.

Written by an expert on suicide in young adults, this book looks at many examples of adolescent suicide and explores the complex factors that may contribute to it.

The Noontday Demon: An Atlas of Depression

Andrew Solomon, Scribner, 2001.

Winner of the National Book award. A sufferer of chronic depression, Solomon shares his own story, while presenting the problem of depression in a broader social context.

November of the Soul: The Enigma of Suicide

George Howe Colt, Scribner 2006.

From National Book Award Finalist George Howe Colt comes this comprehensive (500+ page) and scholarly exploration of suicide. Based on in-depth reporting and case studies, and extensively footnoted, Colt considers suicide from a wide range of perspectives, including cultural, historical, biological, and psychological. (While an excellent treatise on the topic of suicide, this book is probably best for survivors who are further along in their healing. Newly-bereaved survivors may find it a bit overwhelming.)

Understanding Depression: What We Know and What You Can Do About It

J. Raymond DePaulo Jr., M.D. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2002.

The Psychiatrist-in-Chief of the Johns Hopkins Hospital presents a comprehensive, user-friendly guide to depression, including the latest research in brain chemistry, psychology and pharmacology.

Why Suicide? Questions and Answers about Suicide, Suicide Prevention, and Coping with the Suicide of Someone You Know (2nd ed.)

Eric Marcus, HarperOne, 2010.

Eric Marcus was 12 years old when he lost his father, Irwin, to suicide in 1970. More recently, his sister-in-law also took her life, prompting him to reconsider his own experience and revise his original, and well-received, Why Suicide? Marcus integrates his personal experience and journalistic skills in this comprehensive yet accessible primer on all aspects of suicide, its prevention, and aftermath.

WE REMEMBER THEM

At the rising of the sun and its going down, we remember them.

At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter, we remember them.

At the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring, we remember them.

At the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of summer, we remember them.

At the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of autumn, we remember them.

At the beginning of the year and when it ends, we remember them.

*As long as we live, they too will live;
for they are now a part of us, as we remember them.*

When we are weary and in need of strength, we remember them.

When we are lost and sick at heart, we remember them.

When we have joy we crave to share, we remember them.

When we have decisions that are difficult to make, we remember them.

When we have achievements that are based on theirs, we remember them.

*As long as we live, they too will live;
for they are now a part of us, as we remember them.*

We encourage survivors to gather, to remember, to speak aloud the precious names of those lost to suicide. You are in a safe place with those who understand.

If you are very new to the tragedy of suicide loss, despair may be your companion. We hope you find some time to rest your burden and share it with those of us who need no explanation.

There is no map on this path to becoming whole. It is the most painful of journeys — full of twists and turns, bruised hearts and misunderstandings. Small wonders appear on this path but we may be too sore or fragile to recognize them. But there will be a day when you can look back and know that they were there.

We share your loneliness. We share your sorrow. We share your questions. We honor those we love who have been lost to suicide. May the radiance and beauty of their lives never be defined by their deaths.

Survivors are the most courageous people we know. Be well, be peaceful, be hopeful.



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